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THE CONCEPT OF EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY.

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THIS PAPER EXAMINES THE CONCEPT OF "EQUALITY OF EDUCATION" IN TERMS OF ITS MEANING TO SOCIETY. THE AUTHOR DISCUSSES WHAT THE CONCEPT HAS MEANT IN THE PAST, BEGINNING WITH PRE-INDUSTRIAL EUROPE AND ENDING WITH THE UNITED STATES OFFICE OF EDUCATION'S SURVEY, "EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY." HE ALSO SUGGESTS WHAT THE CONCEPT, AS IT HAS EVOLVED TO THE PRESENT, WILL MEAN IN THE FUTURE. HE ASKS THE QUESTIONS--WHOSE OBLIGATION IS IT TO PROVIDE SUCH EQUALITY. IS THE CONCEPT A FUNDAMENTALLY SOUND ONE, OR DOES IT HAVE INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS OR CONFLICTS WITH SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. THE AUTHOR SEES THE BASIC CHANGE IN THE CONCEPT OF "EQUALITY OF EDUCATION" AS EVOLVING FROM THE PROVISION OF EQUAL LEARNING FACILITIES FOR ALL WITHOUT CONCERN FOR INDIVIDUAL, EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES, TO AN ACTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM THAT WILL OVERCOME INDIVIDUAL HANDICAPS RESULTING FROM ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR A CONFERENCE ON THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION REPORT ON "EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY" OCT. 21, 1967, HARVARD, CAMBRIDGE. (RF)

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THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS OF SCHOOLS

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by

James S. Coleman

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*This paper was prepared for a conference on the U. S. Office of Education report on Equality of Educational Opportunity, held by Harvard University Graduate School of Education, October 21, 1967. It will be published in a forthcoming issue of the Harvard Educational Review.

I want to focus attention on a general concept or idea, and the way in which that concept, as held by people in society, has changed over recent history, and is likely to change in the future. That concept is " equality of educational opportunity." What has it meant in the past, what does it mean now, and what will it mean in the future? Whose obligation is it to provide such equality? Is the concept a fundamentally sound one, or does it have inherent contradictions or conflicts with social organization? But first of all, and above all, what is and has been meant in society by the idea of equality of educational opportunity?

To answer this question leads back to the conception of the position of the child in society. In pre-industrial Europe, the child's horizons were largely limited by his family. His father's station in life was overwhelmingly likely to be his own. If his father were a serf, he would likely become one as well; if his father were a shoemaker, he would likely become a shoemaker. But even this immobility was not the crux of the matter: he was a part of the family production enterprise, and would likely remain within this enterprise throughout his life. The extended family, as the basic unit of social organization, had complete authority over the child (and very nearly complete authority over all its members), and complete responsibility for him. This responsibility ordinarily did not end when the child became an adult, because he remained a part of the same economic unit, merely perpetuating it into the next generation. There was certainly some mobility out of the family, but the general pattern was family continuity through a patriarchal kinship system.

There are two elements of critical importance here. The first is that the family carried responsibility for its members' welfare from cradle to grave. It was a "welfare society" with the extended families as welfare organizations for their own members. Thus it was to the family's interest

to see that its members became productive. Conversely, it was of relatively small interest whether someone in another family became productive or not - merely because the mobility of productive labor between family economic units was relatively low. If the son of a neighbor was allowed to become a ne'er do well, it had little real effect on the family itself.

The second important element is that the family, as a unit of economic production, provided an appropriate context where the child could learn the things he needed to know. The craftsman's shop or the farmer's fields were appropriate training grounds for sons, and the household was an appropriate training ground for daughters.

In this kind of society, the concept of equality of educational opportunity had no relevance at all. The child and adult were embedded within the extended family and the child's education or training was merely that necessary to maintain the family's productivity. The fixed stations in life which most families occupied precluded any general ideas of "opportunity," and even less equality of opportunity. It is important also to note that this social structure did not disappear everywhere at once - and in particular, that Negroes in the rural south have been under such conditions until the present generation. Until mobility to urban areas became great, most Negroes remained under an essentially feudal social structure, with a fixed station in life for the family, in which education, beyond that gained on the farm, was irrelevant.

With the industrial revolution, changes occurred in both the family's function as a self-perpetuating economic unit, and as a training ground. As there arose economic organizations outside the household, children began to be occupationally mobile, outside their family. As families lost their economic production activities, they began also to lose their welfare functions, and the poor or ill or incapacitated became more nearly a commun-

ity responsibility. Thus the training which a child recieved began to be of interest to all in the community, either as his potential employers or as his potential economic supports if he became dependent. In 18th century England, during this stage of development, communities had laws preventing immigration from another community, because of the potential economic burden of immigrants.

Secondly, as some men came to employ their own labor outside the family, in these new factories, their families became less useful economic training grounds for their children.

This fundamental change in social structure paved the way for public education. Families needed a context within which their children could learn some general skills that would be useful for gaining work outside their family; and men of influence in the community began to be interested in the potential productivity of other men's children.

It was in the early 19th century that the foundations of public education began in Europe and America. Before that time, there had been a strong development of private education in the classes most affected by the industrial revolution or by commerce. These families had both the need and resources to have their children educated outside the home, either for professional occupations or for occupations in the developing world of commerce. But the idea of general educational opportunity for children arose only in the 19th century.

The time at which public, tax-supported education began was, however, not solely a function of the stage of industrial development. It was also a function of the class structure in the society. In the United States, without a strong and traditional class structure, publicly-supported free schools began in the early 19th century, while in England, the "voluntary schools," run and organized by churches, were not supplemented by a state-

supported system until the Education Act of 1870. Even more, the character of educational opportunity reflected the class structure. In the United States, the public schools quickly became the common school, attended by all but the upper classes, and providing a common educational experience for nearly all American children - excluding only upper-class children in private schools, and Indians and Southern Negroes, without schools). In England, however, the class system directly manifested itself through the schools. The state-supported, or "board schools," as they were called, became the schools of the laboring lower classes, with a sharply different curriculum form the voluntary schools of the middle and upper classes. The division was so sharp that two government Departments, the Education Department and the Science and Art Department, administered external examinations, the first for the products of the board schools, and the second for the products of the voluntary schools, as they progressed into secondary education. It was only the latter curricula and examinations that provided admission to further education.

What is most striking is the length of influence of such a dual structure. Even today in England, nearly a century later, (and in different forms in most European countries), there exists a dual structure of public secondary education, with only one of the branches providing the curriculum for college admission. In England, this branch includes the remnant of the system of voluntary schools which slowly became part of the state-supported system, though retaining their individual identity.

From this comparison of England and the United States, one point becomes clear: the impact of a strong class structure of the society, and legitimacy of this structure, on the concept of educational opportunity. In 19th century England, the idea of <u>equality</u> of educational opportunity hardly arose, for the system was designed to provide a <u>differentiated</u> educational opportunity, appropriate to one's station in life. In the United States

as well, the absence of educational opportunity for Negroes in the South arose from the caste and feudal structure of the largely rural society. One could express the idea of differentiated educational opportunity provided in England by the 1870 act as deriving from a dual need: the needs, arising from industrialization, for a basic education for the labor force, and the interests in having one's own child receive a good education. The middle classes could implement both these aims by providing a free system for the children of laboring classes, and a tuition system (which soon came to be supplemented by state grants) for their own. The long survival of this differentiated system depended not only on the historical fact that the voluntary schools existed before a public system came into existence, but on the fact that it allows both of these needs to be met: the community's collective need for a trained labor force, and the middle class individual's need for a better education for his own child. It serves a third need as well: that of maintaining the existing social order - a system of stratification that was a step removed from a feudal system of fixed estates, but was designed to prevent a wholesale challenge by the children of the working class to the positions held for children of the middle classes.

The similarity of this system to that which existed in the South to provide differential opportunity to Negroes and whites is striking, just as the similarity of class structure in the second half of the 19th century England to the white-Negro caste structure of the Southern United States in the first half of the 20th century.

In the United States, from the beginning, the concept of educational opportunity (for whites) was a concept of <u>equality</u> of opportunity. Both the absence of a legitimate class structure in the United States, and the need to provide a common integrating experience, a "melting pot," for

immigrants from diverse backgrounds, led away from a differentiated system, and toward a common school.

But the concept of equality of educational opportunity held then was itself a special concept. Equality of opportunity meant several things:

1. Providing a free education up to a given level which constituted the principal entry point to the labor force.

2. Providing a common curriculum for all children, regardless of background.

3. Partly by design and partly because of low population density, providing that children from diverse backgrounds attend the same school.

4. Providing equality within a given locality, since local taxes provided the source of support for schools.

This conception of equality of opportunity is that which is still held by many persons; but there are some assumptions in it which are not obvious. First, it implicitly assumes that the existence of free schools eliminates economic sources of inequality of opportunity. But free schools do not mean that the costs of a child's education become reduced to zero for families at all economic levels. When free education was introduced, many families could not afford it beyond an early age of the child. His labor was necessary to the family - whether in rural or urban areas. Even after the passage of child labor laws, this remained true on the farm. These economic sources of inequality of opportunity have become small indeed (up through secondary education); but at one time, they were a major source of inequality, and in some countries, they remain so; and certainly, for higher education, they remain so.

Apart from economic needs of the family, the social structure was such as to raise even more fundamental questions about equality of educational opportunity. Continued school attendance prevented a boy's being trained in his father's trade. Thus taking advantage of the "equal educational

opportunity" excluded the son of a craftsman or small tradesmen from opportunity for those occupations he would most likely fill in any case. The family inheritance of occupation at all social levels was still strong enough, and the age of entry into the labor force was still early enough, that secondary education interfered with opportunity for working class children; while it opened up opportunities at higher social levels, it closed them at lower ones.

Again, there remain residues of this social structure in present American society, so that the dilemma cannot be totally ignored. The idea of a common educational experience implies that this experience has only the effect of widening the range of opportunity, never the effect of excluding opportunities. But it is clear that this is never precisely true, so long as this experience prevents a child from pursuing certain occupational paths. This question still arises with differentiated secondary curriculum: an academic program in high school has not only the effect of keeping open the opportunities that arise through continued education, but also the effect of closing off opportunities that a vocational program keeps open. I will want to return to this question later, for it is relevant to current questions concerning vocational education and to questions concerning the length of education.

A second assumption implied by this concept of equality of opportunity is that opportunity lay in <u>exposure</u> to a given curriculum. The amount of opportunity is then measured in terms of the level of curriculum to which the child is exposed. The higher the curriculum made available to a given set of children, the greater their opportunity.

The most interesting point about both these assumptions is the relatively passive role of the school and community, relative to the child's role. The school's obligation was to "provide an opportunity" by being

available, within easy geographic access of the child, free of cost (beyond the value of the child's time), and with a curriculum that would not exclude him from higher education. The obligation to "use the opportunity" was on the child or the family, so that his role was defined to be the active one, with the responsibility for achievement upon him. Despite the fact that the school's role was the relatively passive one and the child's or family's role the active one, the use of this social service soon came to be no longer a choice of the parent or child, but that of the state, through passage of compulsory attendance laws. These laws began in the 19th century, and have been periodically revised upward in age.

This concept of equality of educational opportunity is one that has been implicit in most educational practice throughout most of the period of public education in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, there have been several challenges to it, serious questions raised by new conditions in public education. The first of these in the United States was a challenge to assumption 2, the common of curriculum, and it occurred in the early years of the 20th century with the expansion of secondary education. Until the report of the committee of the National Education Association issued in 1918, the standard curriculum in secondary schools had been a classical one, college preparatory, appropriate for the college entrance which lay ahead of most of the school's graduates. But then as there came a massive influx of non-college bound adolescents into the high school, this curriculum changed into one appropriate for the new majority. This is not to say it changed immediately in any schools, nor that all schools changed equally, but rather that the seven cardinal principles became a powerful influence in the movement toward a less academically rigid curriculum. The introduction of the new non-classical curriculum was seldom if ever couched in terms of a conflict between those for whom high school was college preparation, and those for

whom it was terminal education; nevertheless, this is what it was. The "inequality" was the use of a curriculum that served a minority and was not designed to fit the needs of the majority; and the shift of curriculum was intended to fit the curriculum to the needs of the new majority in the schools.

This took, in many schools, the form of <u>diversifying</u> the curriculum, rather than supplanting one by another; the college preparatory curriculum remained, though watered down. Thus the kind of equaltiy of opportunity that emerged from the newly-designed secondary school curriculum is one radically different from the elementary-school concept that had emerged earlier. Here the idea appears to have been to take as given the diverse occupational paths into which adolescents will go after secondary school, and to say (implictly): there is greater equality of educational opportunity for a boy who is not going to attend college if he has a special-designed curriculum than if he must take a curriculum designed for college entrance. There is only one difficulty with this definition: it takes as <u>given</u> what should be problematic: that a given boy is going into a given occupational path, or going to attend college or not. It is one thing to take as given that approximately 60% of an entering high school freshman class will not attend college; but to assign a <u>particular child</u> to a curriculum designed for that 60% closes off for that child the opportunity to attend college. Yet to assign all children to a curriculum designed for the 40% who will attend college creates inequality for those who, at the end of high school, fall among the 60% who do not attend college. This is a true dilemma, and one which no educational system has fully solved. It is more general than the college-non-college dichotomy, for there is a wide variety of different paths that adolescents take on the completion of secondary school. In England, for example, a student planning to attend a university must

specialize in the arts or the sciences in the later years of secondary school. Similar specialization occurs in the German gymnasium; and this is wholly within the group planning to attend university. A wider range of specialization can be found among non-college curricula, especially in the vocational technical and commercial high schools.

The distinguishing characteristic of this concept of equality of educational opportunity is that it accepts as given the child's expected future. While the concept discussed earlier left the child's future wholly open, this concept of differentiated curricula uses this expected future to match child and curriculum. It should be noted that the first and simpler concept is easier to apply in elementary schools, where fundamental tools of reading and arithmetic are being learned by all children; it is only in secondary school that the problem of diverse futures arises. It should also be noted that the dilemma is directly due to the social structure itself: if there were a virtual absence of social mobility, with everyone occupying a fixed estate in life, then such curricula that take the future as given would provide equality of opportunity relative to that structure. It is only because of the high degree of occupational mobility between generations - that is, the greater degree of equality of <u>occupational</u> opportunity - that the dilemma arises.

The next stage in the evolution of the idea of equality of educational opportunity came as a result of challenges to the basic concept from opposing directions: The Southern states in the United States, in the face of Negro demands for equality of opportunity, devised the concept of "separate but equal." And the Supreme Court countered this with the doctrine that legal separation by race inherently constitutes inequality of opportunity. Thus the Southern states challenged assumption 3 of the original concept, the assumption that equality depended on the opportunity to attend the same school. This challenge was, however,

consistent with the overall logic of the original concept, for the idea of attendance at the same school was not really part of the logic. The logic, or inherent idea, was that opportunity resided in exposure to a curriculum, and the community's responsibility was to provide that exposure, the child's to take advantage of it.

It was the pervasiveness of this underlying idea which created the difficulty for the Supreme Court. It was evident that even when identical facilities and identical teacher salaries existed for racially separate schools, "equality of educational opportunity" in some sense did not exist. This had also long been evident to Englishmen as well, in a different context, for with the simultaneous existence of the "common school" and the "voluntary school," no one was under the illusion that full equality of educational opportunity had existed. But the source of this inequality remained an unarticulated feeling. In the decision of the Supreme Court, this unarticulated feeling began to take form. The essence of it was that the <u>effects</u> of such separate schools were, or were likely to be, different. This the concept of equality of opportunity which focussed on effects of schooling began to take form. The actual decision of the court was in fact a confusion of two unrelated premises: this new concept, which looked at results of schooling, and the legal premise that the use of race as a basis for school assignment violates fundamental freedoms. But what is important for the evolution of this concept of equality of opportunity is that a new and different assumption was introduced - the assumption that equality of opportunity depends in some fashion upon effects of schooling. I believe the decision would have been more soundly based had it not depended on the effects of schooling; but only on the violation of freedom; but by so doing it brought into the open the implicit goals of equality of educational opportunity - that is, goals having to do with the <u>results</u> of

school - to which the original concept was somewhat awkwardly directed. That these goals were in fact behind the concept can be verified by a simple mental experiment: suppose the early schools had operated for only one hour a week, attended by children of all social classes. This would have met the explicit assumptions of the early concept of equality of opportunity, since the school is free, with a common curriculum, and attended by all children in the locality. But it obviously would not have been accepted, even at that time, as providing equality of opportunity, because its effects would have been so minimal. The additional educational resources provided by middle and upper class families, whether in the home, by tutoring, or in private supplementary schools, would have created severe inequalities in results.

Thus the dependence of the concept upon results or effects of schooling which had lain hidden until 1954, came partially into the open with the Supreme Court decision. Yet this was not the end, for it created more problems than it solved. It might allow one to assess gross inequalities, such as that created by dual school systems in the South, or by a system like that in the mental experiment I just described. But it allows nothing beyond that. Even more confounding, since the decision did not use effects of schooling as a criterion of inequality, but only as justification for a criterion of racial integration, then integration itself emerged as the basis for still a new concept of equality of educational opportunity. Thus the idea of effects of schooling as an element in the conept was introduced, but immediately overshadowed by another, the criterion of racial integration.

The next stage in the evolution of this concept was, I believe, the Office of Education Survey of Equality of Educational Opportunity. This survey was carried out under a mandate in the Civil Rights Act to the Commissioner of Education to assess the "inequalities of educational opportunity" among racial and other groups in the United States. The evolution

of this concept, and the existing disarray which this evolution had created, made the very definition of the task exceedingly difficult. The original concept could be examined by determining the degree to which all children in a locality had access to the same schools, and the same curriculum, free of charge. The existence of diverse secondary curricula appropriate to different futures could be assessed relatively easily. But the very assignment of a child to such a curriculum implies acceptance of the concept of equality which takes futures as given. And the introduction of the new ideas, equality as measured by results of schooling, and equality defined by racial integration, confounded the issue even further.

As a consequence, in planning the survey, it was obvious that no single concept of equality of educational opportunity existed; and that the survey must give information relevant to a variety of different concepts. The basis on which this was done can be seen by reproducing a portion of an internal memorandum that determined the design of the survey:

"The point of (second importance in design second to the point of discovering the intent of Congress, which was taken to be that the survey was not for the purpose of locating willful discrimination, but to determine educational inequality without regard to intention of those in authority) follows from the first and concerns the definition of inequality. One type of inequality may be defined in terms of differences of the community's input to the school, such as per pupil expenditure, school plants, libraries, quality of teachers, and other similar quantities.

A second type of inequality may be defined in terms of the racial composition of the school, following the Supreme Court's decision that segregated schooling is inherently inequal. By the former definition, the question of inequality through segregation is excluded, while by the latter, there is inequality of education within a school system so long as the schools within the system have different racial composition.

A third type of inequality would include various intangible characteristics of the school as well as the factors directly traceable to the community inputs to the school. These intangibles are such things as teacher morale, teachers' expectations of students, level of interest of the student body in learning, or others. Any of these factors may affect the impact of the school upon a given student within it. Yet such a definition gives no suggestion of where to stop, or just how relevant these factors might be for school quality.

Consequently, a fourth type of inequality may be defined in terms of consequences of the school for individuals with equal backgrounds and abilities. In this definition, equality of educational opportunity is equality of results, given the same individual input. With such a definition, inequality might come about from differences in the school inputs and/or racial composition and/or from more intangible things as described above.

Such a definition obviously would require that two steps be taken in the determination of inequality. First, it is necessary to determine the effect of these various factors upon educational results (conceiving of results quite broadly, including not only achievement but attitudes toward learning, self-image, and perhaps other variables). This provides various measures of the school's quality in terms of its effects upon its students. Second, it is necessary to take these measures of quality, once determined, and determine the differential exposure of Negroes (or other groups) and whites to schools of high and low quality.

A fifth type of inequality may be defined in terms of consequences of the school for individuals of unequal backgrounds and abilities. In this definition, equality of educational opportunity is equality of results given <u>different</u> individual inputs. The most striking examples of inequality here would be children from households in which a language other than English, such as Spanish or Navaho, is spoken. Other examples would be low

achieving children from homes in which there is a poverty of verbal expression or an absence of experiences which lead to conceptual facility.

Such a definition taken in the extreme would imply that educational equality is reached only when the results of schooling (achievement and attitudes) are the same for racial and religious minorities as for the dominant group. "

The basis for the design is indicated by another segment of this memorandum: "Thus, the study will focus its principal effort on the fourth definition, but will also provide information relevant to all five possible definitions. This insures the pluralism which is obviously necessary with respect to a definition of inequality. The major justification for this focus is that the results of this approach can best be translated into policy which will improve education's effects. The results of the first two approaches (tangible inputs to the school, and segregation) can certainly be translated into policy, but there is no good evidence that these policies will improve education's effects; and while policies to implement the fifth would certainly improve education's effects, it seems hardly possible that the study could provide information that would direct such policies.

Altogether, it has become evident that it is not our role to define what constitutes equality for policy-making purposes. Such a definition will be an outcome of the interplay of a variety of interests, and will certainly differ from time to time as these interests differ. It should be our role to cast light on the state of inequality defined in the variety of ways which appear reasonable at this time."

The Survey, then, was conceived as a pluralistic instrument, given the variety of ideas which had some claim of the concept of equality of opportunity in education. Yet I suggest that despite the avowed intention of not adjudicating between these different ideas, it has brought a new

stage in the evolution of the concept. For the definitions of equality for which the survey was designed split sharply into two groups: The first three concerned input resources: first, those brought to the school by the actions of the school administration: facilities, curriculum, teachers; second, those brought to the school by the other students, in the educational backgrounds which their presence contributed to the school; and third, the intangible characteristics such as "morale" that result from the interaction of all these factors. The last two definitions concerned the <u>effects</u> of schooling. Thus the dichotomy between inputs to school and effects of schooling divided these five definitions. When the report emerged, it did not give five different measures of equality, one for each of these definitions; but it did focus sharply on this dichotomy, giving in chapter 2 information on inequalities of input, relevant to definitions 1 and 2; and in chapter 3 information on inequalities of results, relevant to definitions 4 and 5, and also in chapter 3, information on the relation of input to results, again relevant to definitions 4 and 5.

Though it is not directly relevant to our discussion here, it is interesting to note that this examination of the relation of school inputs to achievement results showed that it is precisely those input characteristics of schools that are most alike for Negroes and whites that are least effective for their achievement. Differences between schools attended by Negroes and those attended by whites were in the following increasing order: least, facilities and curriculum; next, teacher quality, and greatest, educational backgrounds of fellow students. This is precisely the same order of the effects of these characteristics on achievement of Negro students: facilities and curriculum least, teacher quality next, and backgrounds of fellow student, most.

By making the dichotomy between inputs and results explict, and by focussing attention not only on inputs but on results, I suggest the Report brought into the open what had underlay all the ideas of equality of educational opportunity but had remained largely hidden: that the concept implied effective equality of opportunity, that is, equality in those elements that are effective for learning. The reason this had lay half-hidden, obscured by definitions that involve inputs is, I suspect, because educational research has been until recently unprepared to demonstrate what elements are effective. The controversy that has surrounded the Report indicates that such measurement of effects are still subject to sharp disagreement; but the crucial point is that effects of inputs have come to constitute the basis for assessment of school quality (and thus equality of opportunity), rather than the mere definition of particular inputs as being measures of quality (e.g., small classes are better than large, higher-paid teachers are better than lower-paid ones, by definition).

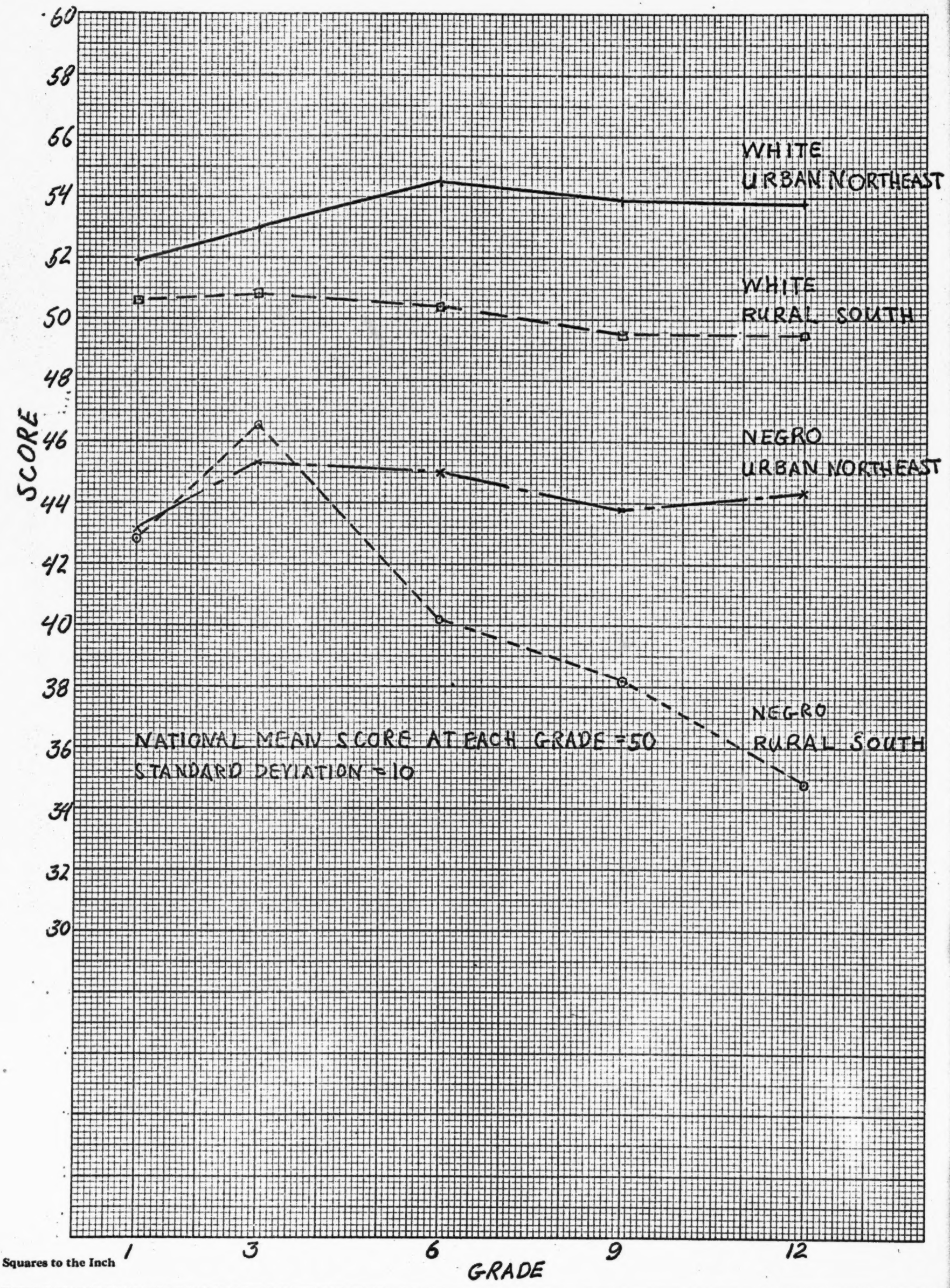
It would be fortunate indeed if the matter could be left to rest there; if merely by using effects of school rather than inputs as the basis for the concept, the problem were solved. But that is not the case at all. The conflict between definitions 4 and 5 given above shows that: This conflict can be shown more sharply by resorting again to the mental experiment discussed earlier, with a standard education of one hour per week, under identical conditions, for all children. By definition 4, controlling all background differences of the children, results for Negroes and whites would be equal, and thus by this definition, equality of opportunity would exist. But because such minimal schooling would have minimal effect, those children from educationally strong families would far outdistance others. And because such educationally strong backgrounds are found more often

among whites than among Negroes, there would be very large overall Negro - white achievement differences - and thus inequality of opportunity by definition 5.

It is clear from this experiment that the problem of what constitutes equality of opportunity is not solved. The problem will be come even clearer by showing graphs with some of the results of the survey. The highest line shows the achievement in verbal skills of whites in the urban Northeast, at grades 1, 3, 6, 9, and 12. The second line shows the achievement at each of these grades of whites in the rural Southeast. The third shows the achievement of Negroes in the urban Northeast; and the fourth shows the achievement of Negroes in the rural Southeast.

Considering the whites in the urban Northeast as a comparison base for each of the other three groups, each shows a different pattern. The comparison with whites in the Rural South shows two groups beginning near the same point in grade 1, and diverging over the years of school. The comparison with Negroes in the Urban Northeast shows two groups beginning farther apart at grade 1 and remaining about the same distance apart. The comparison with Negroes in the rural South shows two groups beginning far apart and moving much farther apart over the years of school.

Which of these charts shows equality of educational opportunity between regional and racial groups, if any does so? Thich shows greatest inequality of opportunity? I think the second question is easier to answer than the first. The last comparison showing both initial difference and the greatest increase in difference over grades 1-12, appears the best candidate for greatest inequality. The first comparison, with whites in thr rural South, also seems to show inequality of opportunity, because of the increasing difference over the 12 years. But what about the second comparison, with an approximately constant difference between Negroes and whites in the urban Northeast? Is this equality of opportunity? I suggest that it is hardly so. It means, in effect, only that the period of school has left the average Negro at about the same level of achievement relative to whites as he began - that is in this case achieving higher than about 15% of the whites, lower than about 85% of the whites.



20 Squares to the Inch

It may well be that in the absence of school, those lines of achievement would have diverged, due to differences in home environments; or perhaps they would have remained an equal distance apart, as they are in this graph (though at lower levels of achievement for both groups, in the absence of school). If it were the former, we could say that school, by keeping the lines parallel, has been a force toward the equalization of opportunity. But in the absence of such knowledge, we cannot even say that.

What would full equality of educational opportunity look like in such graphs? One might persuasively argue that it should show a convergence, so that even though two population groups begin school with different levels of skills on the average, the average of the group that begins lower moves up to coincide with that of the group that begins higher. Parenthetically, I should note that this does <u>not</u> imply that all students' achievement comes to be identical, but only that the <u>averages</u> for two population groups that begin at different levels come to be identical. The diversity of individual scores could be as great as, or greater than, the diversity at grade 1.

Yet there are serious questions about this definition of equality of opportunity. It implies that over the period of school, there are no other influences, such as the family environment, which affect achievement over the 12 years of school, even though these influences may differ greatly for the two population groups. Concretely, it implies that white family environments, predominantly middle class, and Negro family environments, predominantly lower class, will produce no effects on achievement that would keep these averages apart. Such an assumption seems highly unrealistic, especially in view of the general importance of family background for achievement.

However, if such possibilities are acknowledged, then how far can they go before there is inequality of educational opportunity? Constant difference over school? Increaing differences?

The unanswerability of such questions begins to give a sense of a new concept of equality of educational opportunity - because these questions concern the relative intensity of two sets of influences: those which are alike for the two groups, principally in school, and those which are different, such as those in the home or neighborhood. If the school's influences are not only alike for the two groups, but very strong, relative to the divergent influences, then the two groups will move together. If they are very weak, then they will move apart. Or more generally, the relative intensity of the convergent school influences and the divergent out-of-school influences determines the proximity of the educational system to providing equality of educational opportunity. In this perspective, complete equality of opportunity can only be reached if all the divergent out-of-school influences vanish, a condition that would arise only in the advent of boarding schools; given the existing divergent influences, equality of opportunity can only be approached and never fully reached. The concept becomes one of degree of proximity to equality of opportunity. This proximity is determined, then, not merely by the equality of educational inputs, but by the intensity of the school's influences, relative to the external divergent influences. That is, equality of output is not so much determined by equality of the resource inputs, but by the power of these resources in bringing about achievement.

This, then, I suggest is the place where the concept of equality of educational opportunity presently stands - an evolution that might have been anticipated a century and a half ago when the first such concepts arose, yet one which is very different from the concept as it first

developed. This difference is sharpened if we examine a further implication of the current concept as I have described it. In describing the early concept, I indicated that the role of the community, and the educational institution, was a relatively passive one, that of providing a set of free public resources. The responsibility for profitable use of those resources lay with the child and his family. But the evolution of the concept has reversed these roles. The implication of the concept as I have described it above is that the responsibility to create achievement lies with the educational institution, not the child. The difference in achievement at grade 12 between the average Negro and the average white is, in effect, the degree of inequality of opportunity, and the reduction of that inequality is a responsibility of the school. This shift in responsibility follows logically from the shift of the concept of equality of opportunity from school resource inputs to effects of schooling. When that shift came about as it has in the past several years, the school's responsibility shifted from increasing <u>its</u> "quality" and equalizing the distribution of this "quality" to the quality of its <u>students</u>' achievements. This is a notable shift, and one which should have stong consequences for the practice of education in future years.